

Message Text

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SUBJ: CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ ON THE PANAMA CANAL

SUMMARY

IN THE ROWAN INTERVIEW CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ AGAIN DEMONSTRATED A RASH AND COMBATIVE APPROACH TO SENSITIVE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL QUESTIONS. HIS REMARKS ON THE ISSUE OF THE PANAMA CANAL REFLECTED CONVICTIONS THAT THE US IGNORES LATIN AMERICAN CONCERNS, THAT HE PERSONALLY HAS A BOLIVARIAN OBLIGATION TO HIS SMALL NEIGHBOR AND THAT HE CAN REASONABLY BELIEVE THE WORST OF THE US -- AT LEAST WHEN IT SUITS HIS PURPOSE. PEREZ MAY ALSO HAVE HAD IN MIND DISTRACTING PUBLIC ATTENTION FROM THE HIGHLY-CHARGED ISSUES IN PETROLEUM NATIONALIZATION. HE DOES, HOWEVER, SINCERELY BELIEVE THAT THE CANAL IS THE CENTRAL PROBLEM IN LATIN AMERICAN-US RELATIONS. UNFORTUNATELY HE GETS MOST OF HIS INFORMATION FROM TORRIJOS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE OUTBURST ON THE CANAL ISSUE PRESIDENT PEREZ DELIVERED HIMSELF OF IN THE ROWAN INTERVIEW WAS MOST UNHELPFUL BYT CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS BEHAVIOUR PATTERN IN SEVERAL RESPECTS. -- PEREZ IS SEEMINGLY CONVINCED THAT NOBODY UP THERE IS LISTENING. HE HAS COMPLAINED TO ME ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS AND LENGTH THAT LATIN AMERICAN CONCERNS AND PROBLEMS AROUSE NO INTEREST IN THE US, PARTICULARLY IN THE CONGRESS.

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(THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TRADE REFORM ACT WEIGHS HEAVILY IN

THIS RESPECT.) HIS RESPONSE, AS DEMONSTRATED IN THE TIME, AND ROWAN INTERVIEWS, IS TO COME ON WITH ATTENTION-GETTING BELLICOSITY WHEN HE THINKS HE MAY HAVE A LARGE US AUDIENCE.

-- PEREZ SEES HIMSELF AS THE TRUSTEE OF THE BOLIVARIAN HERITAGE. HE IS STRONG ON BOLIVARIAN SOLIDARITY AND ESPECIALLY PROTECTIVE OF THE INTERESTS OF THE SMALLER COUNTRIES OF THE GROUP. THUS WE HAVE HIS CONTINUING INVOLVEMENT IN BOLIVIA'S ACCESS-TO-THE -SEA PROBLEM AND HIS PASSIONATE ADVOCACY OF THE PANAMANIAN CAUSE.

-- PEREZ IS TOUCHY AND HIGHLY TEMPERAMENTAL, GIVEN TO BOUTS OF BELLIGERENCY FOLLOWED BY PERIODS OF RELATIVE MODERATION. HE WAS BADLY STUNG BY THE PARODY IN TIME MAGAZINE (CARACAS 11293) AND HIS MOOD DURING THE ROWAN INTERVIEW PROBABLY REFLECTED THAT FACT.

-- PEREZ IS BULLIBLE-- OR LIKES TO PRETEND TO BE-- WHEN IT COMES TO STORIES ABOUT OUR SINISTER DESIGNS. (THE NOTION HE ENTERETAINED THAT THE CIA MIGHT BE PLOTTING WITH ERIC WILLIAMS - CARACAS 6445- IS A CASE IN POINT.) WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT PRECISELY TORRIJOS SAID ABOUT OUR TROOPS AND TRAINING IN THE ZONE, BUT A SUGGESTION THAT WE WERE UP TO NO GOOD WOULD HAVE BEEN SUFFICIENT. PEREZ IDENTIFIES PERSONALLY WITH TORRIJOS AND WOULD NOT BE LIKELY TO CHALLENGE THE PANAMANIAN'S VERSION OF EVENTS.

2. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD THE THEORY THAT THE PRESIDENT IS CREATING THIS FUROR OVER PANAMA (AND IN DELIVERING HIS HARDLINE SPEECH TO THE WORLD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE-SEPTTEL) WAS SEEKING TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM THE PROBLEMS OF PETROLEUM NATIONALIZATION. IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT HE IS NOT ADVERSE TO DIVERSIONS THAT MIGHT IN PARTICULAR HELP SCREEN THE ISSUE OF THE PR-BARREL TECHNOLOGY FEE.

3. NONE OF THIS IS TO SAY THAT PEREZ IS LESS THAN SINCERE WHEN HE TELLS US PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY THAT THE CANAL PROBLEM IS THE TOUCHSTONE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE "TWO AMERICAS." HIS VIEW OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF A FAILED NEGOTIATION IS APOCALYPTIC. HE UNDOUBTEDLY CONSIDERS HIS WARNINGS TO US WELL INTENTIONED IN THAT LIGHT.
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4. VIRTUALLY EVERY CONVERSATION I HAVE HAD WITH THE PRESIDENT AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS HAS AT LEAST TOUCHED ON THE CANAL ISSUE. HOWEVER, NONE OF THESE DISCUSSIONS HAS BEEN VERY MEANINGFUL. THE VENEZUELANS HAVE SIMPLY KEPT REITERATING THEIR RATHER OBSESSIVE CONCERN, AND I HAVE COUNTERED WITH EVIDENCE AND ASSURANCES OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S GOOD FAITH--ASSURANCES THE PRESIDENT

SEEMS TO CREDIT IN HIS CALMER MOMENTS(CARACAS 10895).
IN ANY EVENT, WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT PEREZ GETS HIS
INFORMATION ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FROM TORRIJOS.

5. PEREZ MAY HAVE PUT HIS FOOT INTO IT SLIGHTLY BY GOING
OVERBOARD IN THE ROWAN INTERVIEW. BUT HE IS A HARD MAN TO
EMBARRASS. I WILL AT LEAST TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY OF A BREAKFAST
ON THURSDAY WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER TO SUGGEST THAT THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF THIS KIND OF EXAGGERATED PRESSURE TACTICS
HAS ITS LIMIT.
SHLAUDEMAM

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